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JAPANESE ENAMELS AND CLOISONNES.

SIR RUTHERFORD ALCOCK, in his very readable book, "Art and Art Industries in Japan," has the following very pertinent particulars respecting these two classes of Japanese pottery:

An interesting account of the different kinds of enamel, and of the art of enameling handed down to us from ancient times, might be written, but it could not properly find a place here. Every country, we know, had pottery of more or less perfection in the highest antiquity. From Egypt and Babylon and China; the countries inhabited by the Celtic races; from South America and Mexico, examples may be seen in the British Museum and elsewhere. The art of making glass must have followed much later, and whether it took its origin in Phœnicia or Egypt, we know from existing Greek and Roman specimens that vitrification had reached a high degree of excellence more than twenty centuries back. This knowledge of the ancients would by a natural process lead to the discovery of enamels, and the whole class of vitreous substances, either transparent or opaque, applicable alike to pottery, porcelain and metals, and upon which the whole art of enameling is based. From decorative pottery with glazing of vitreous composition, to porcelain, the transition would be easy, at whatever date it may have actually taken place. The application of the same enamel material to metals may have been contemporaneous. The materials and processes may not have been so perfect or so various as those now employed, but yet essentially similar in kind. As regards the materials used and the processes of manufacture in Japan, I cannot go much into detail, as it is the less necessary as the writer of a "Catalogue raisonné" of the Liverpool Art Collection, which accompanied an exhibition of Japanese works of art some time ago, entered very fully into the subject. It may not be irrelevant, however, if I give a description of what I saw in Pekin as to the methods adopted when they were first seeking to recover the almost forgotten art of cloisonné enamel, now some twelve years ago. The art itself is undoubtedly of great antiquity, not only in China and Japan, but all over Asia and Europe. Little is known of its origin in any of its three forms, cloisonné, champlevé, or surface enamel painting; but most of the ancient nations were acquainted with the art of enameling, and resorted to it for purposes of ornamentation in metal vessels, arms and objects of personal adornment. Cloisonné would seem to furnish the most ancient specimens of enamel known. In absolute ignorance of its origin, it has been surmised to have been first introduced in the Eastern empire in the time of Justinian. We know that it was practiced in his day, and down to the general decadence of Byzantine art and empire together. That the Persians were not unacquainted with some process of enameling during the sixth century, the writer of the catalogue says, we have proof. The cost and labor of all cloisonné enamel-work seems to have induced the abandonment of art of this kind in Europe and Western Asia about the thirteenth century, and in still more recent times the same cause has prevailed to prevent its revival at Paris, after considerable effort and outlay had been incurred with that view.

In the "Catalogue raisonné" above referred to, there was a very good description of the characteristic differences between the Chinese and Japanese cloisonné, and they differ very widely, though not always. The writer says, in the Japanese "we observe grounds covered with delicate scrollwork, in metal lines, with small flowers and rosettes intermixed, masses of intricate diaper-work disposed in various ways, and medallions filled with geometrical devices, or dragons, birds, flowers, and such like. Large masses of floral enrichment (not enclosed in medallions) seldom occur, but several specimens of this may be observed on important pieces in the present collection. The Chinese enamelers adopt a much bolder style of ornamentation, covering their works with large masses of leaves and flowers, peonies and water-lilies being amongst their most favorite objects. Such a treatment demanded less labor and skill than the Japanese methods, but produced works of a more striking character. In addition to this, the Chinese adopted a very brilliant system of coloring, freely using turquoise-blue, deep-red, black and white ground, with the foliage in bright greens, and the flowers in nearly their natural tints."

Of the different kinds of enamel-work, cloisonné is chiefly adopted by both Chinese and Japanese, though in different styles. The champlevé, where the pattern is cut out of the metal base, leaving the divisions in relief, and the enamel paste filling up the hollow or smaller portions, is less commonly adopted. Of translucid enameling I do not know that I have seen any specimens in either country of undoubted authenticity; I mean where the metal is only delicately engraved upon with designs, and then covered with transparent colored enamels, through which the engraved pattern is seen. A third kind of enameling, on metal, referred to in the above catalogue, is occasionally resorted to in China and Japan, but is usually of a very common kind, and only applied to cheap ware; where the metal ground (usually cups, saucers, or plates of very thin substance) is covered with an opaque coating of enamel, upon which are painted with the brush, using enamel pigments, the various designs, subsequently fixed by the action of fire. The same kind of enameling is practiced in Europe, and is very similar to that which is seen on glass and porcelain.

The Japanese cloisonnés which have come to light since the revolution in Japan are miracles of delicate workmanship. I agree with the writer of the catalogue that in this sense they are wholly unrivalled, and in them "manipulative skill has reached its climax; while "we are still at a loss to understand by what means or methods the Japanese were able to produce these masterpieces." I think with him, that "masterpieces they unquestionably are, for we do not hesitate to say that ten centuries of Western enameling have failed to give a tangible evidence of such perfection."

Enamel, I need hardly explain, is a name given to certain substances, transparent or opaque, which are colored by metallic oxides, and so combined that, when ground down and mixed into a paste with volatile oils, they will fuse at a comparatively low temperature, and become vitreous. In reference to the costliness of the material, the same writer adds, "The transparent enamel is composed of silica, oxide of lead, lime, and soda fused together, and the opaque of similar materials, with the addition of tin or bone earth." These, however, are nearly the foundation, as it were, for both kinds of paste are colored by the addition of other oxides, many of them from the precious metals; as, for instance, purple enamel, which is procured by gold, yellow by silver, blue by cobalt, green by copper, violet by manganese, and other colors by combinations of these. But in the article from the *Times* of December 26, 1872, serving as a preface to the Catalogue, I believe a very fallacious test was given by which to distinguish the older and better specimens of Japanese art—the former, it is stated, being always light in weight. With the Chinese, at all events, it is conspicuously the reverse—the modern imitations are more generally light and flimsy, while the ancient or older specimens are massive and weighty.

In the manufacture of cloisonné enamels, the opaque enamels are only used. The following is the process as I observed it at Pekin some years ago, when the demand in Europe for such articles first began to rouse the Chinese to exertions to recover what had virtually become a lost art. The foundation is usually of copper, fashioned to the shape of the article designed, whether a vase, a plaque, or a salver. This is generally of some substance varying from a tenth to an eighth of an inch, and upon this the pattern is soldered on, the cells varying in depth according to the value and excellence of the work. If merely intended as a cheap imitation of the fine old specimens, the object is to make the pattern little more than a mere tracery of wire, so as to require only a very thin layer of paste to fill up the intervening spaces. If, on the contrary, it is to be a true cloisonné, veritable cells are made, varying from one sixth to one-eighth of an inch; into these, when the design is completed, the paste is carefully lodged by small wooden spatulas, according to the color to be produced; and when this stage is completed, the article is passed into a primitive kind of oven, or muffle, built up in the courtyard, where it is fired until the paste is fused and converted into a vitreous substance, and then allowed very gradually to cool. Though carried out—as all things are in China and Japan—in a rough sort of fashion, and with the most primitive tools and contrivances, the process is evidently one requiring great delicacy, care and judgment, as well as skillful manipulation and experience. Too much heat would injure the coloring, besides risking the melting of the copper partitions and foundations, in which case the whole vase might come out misshapen, or the colors might become clouded or otherwise spoiled. Hence one element of costliness, for there is not only the original cost of material and skilled labor—in both directions considerable—but a certain risk of failure, when labor and material alike would be wholly lost. When the article is drawn from the furnace, if the enamels appear to have been successfully fused, it is carefully examined to fill up any inequalities with the enamel paste, and before it is passed to the hands of the polishers it may require several returns to the fire. The polishers carefully grind down all the irregularities, and make the surface as smooth as glass. It often happens, however, that air bubbles cover the surface to a considerable extent, and to polish these entirely out would not only entail a vast increase of labor, but eat away too great a depth of the enamel. When such air bubbles are so large or numerous as to be a positive disfigurement, the hollows must be filled up anew with paste, and the whole again subjected to the action of the fire. The less scrupulous of the manufacturers, however (as many of the earlier collectors in Pekin found to their cost), discovered an easier method of deceiving the eye and concealing such defects by filling up the depressions with colored wax. The result may easily be imagined. After being packed, and after passing through the tropics, with more or less friction on their way to Europe, they came out of their retirement all blistered and seamed, as though they had gone through an attack of small-pox, with great pits where the wax had melted away or fallen out. The bulk of these articles, which have been imported into Europe by ship loads during the last ten years, are modern; not all necessarily of this trumped-up and debased kind, but certainly inferior to the work of the centuries preceding—inferior in design, in carefulness of execution, and in color, yet withal furnishing a striking example of the aptitude and enterprise of the Chinese, who could in a few short years so far recover an art which had been almost entirely lost, as to deceive all but experienced connoisseurs and the most practiced eyes. Certainly Europe has produced nothing in this art to be compared with the Chinese or Japanese cloisonnés, either in the Middle Ages or in modern days, when the ambition of the French was fired to produce works of this nature to rival or excel them. M. Christophile, of Paris, I believe, devoted much time and money during a series of years for the attainment of this object; and although some very beautiful articles were exhibited two or three years ago here in the French Court at the International Exhibition, they were not equal in coloring or design to the originals they were designed to imitate. I understand that the revival of the art has been given up, having been found altogether too costly to pay as a matter of business.

Mr. Audsley says very justly that the "Japanese enamels are characterized by great sobriety of coloring, bright colors being sparingly used." So sparingly indeed, I would add, that they are conspicuous by their absence; and in this lies one of the chief differences between the works of China and Japan in enamel. In so far as I can judge, they rival each other in excellence of workmanship; but I think the Japanese unattractive and decidedly inferior in color. Generally a dark and sombre green is adopted as the ground tint, although other colors—drab, lilac and dark blue—are introduced sometime in the variously designed medallions. Still the effect, to my eye, is monotonous and sombre. Their patterns are generally intricate and minute, small sprays, flowers, diapers and geometrical figures all being laid under contribution, while leaves of various colors—drab, white, light green—are interspersed. These being minutely subdivided, it is impossible not to be struck with admiration at the marvelous delicacy of execution and fertility of invention, if not of imagination, displayed. Such works would be simply unproducible in any country where skilled workmanship of a high order, and artistic in kind, was not abundant and obtainable at an exceedingly low rate of remuneration. Many of their enamel works must represent the labor of years even for two or three hands. The coloring, if not very attractive to a lover of pure and bright colors, is always harmonious and effective, as Mr. Audsley remarks; but I am bound to say that some specimens in the Exhibition at Paris excel anything I have seen in China, both in pure color and richness of effect.

THE MUSICAL CUPIDS—Prize Decorative Woodwork, from the Wurtemburg Trades Society.

Designed and Carved by C. Fischer, Art Worker, in Munich. From a Photograph by A. Zimmer, of Stuttgart.

Of the three kinds of enameling enumerated in the Liverpool catalogue, the cloisonné, the champlevé and the painted, the Japanese, so far as I have seen, only cultivate the first two, unless that which is usually called lacquered porcelain may be considered as properly belonging to the last. Very often, however, the coloring matter laid on with lacquer is not burnt in at all, but may easily be rubbed off, and is only counterfeit enamel.

Mr. Audsley thinks the Japanese excel in this department "beyond any other nation with whose works we are acquainted." As works of art, I have seen nothing Chinese to compare with two large jars in the Exhibition of Paris at this moment—either in manufacture. brilliancy of color, or beauty of design. Except in very small articles, such as beads or clasps, it was rare, a few years ago, to see any large specimens in the shops of Yeddo or Yokohama. It is evident now, from the large number of objects which have found their way to this country in recent years, that it was an art which had become well-nigh obsolete in Japan as in China during the early part of the present century, and that what remained of works of this kind of an important nature must have been interred in the palaces and the *yashikis* of the Daimios. This will account for the fact referred to by Mr. Audsley, that in my former work I only made one incidental allusion to enamel. Some fifteen years ago none but small objects were in the market—very beautiful and perfect as indications of power in this direction, but insignificant in size and the number of specimens. Among other specimens I obtained some enameled beads, which, for delicacy of execution and perfection of workmanship, no less than for beauty of color and design, are equal to the finest examples I have seen of any age or country. But, until the opening of the Exhibition at Paris, all the larger works that had come under my notice—and there was a very fine collection on loan from Mr. Bowes in the South Kensington Museum a short time ago—seemed dull and tame in comparison with Chinese vases and salvers of similar importance. These were almost exclusively in minute diaper patterns, sometimes interspersed with dragons or flowers, geometric figures and scrolls of marvelous minuteness and delicacy, but all of the most subdued colors. For the most part these works can scarcely be called cloisonné; the cells, or *cloisons*, are, I believe, merely formed by wire, and have no depth. They are only wire-work apparently fastened on a copper foundation, in certain patterns, and a thin layer of enamel fills us the interstices, to be fixed by fire.

When brass mountings to furniture become tarnished, they may have their brilliance renewed by first rubbing them with a strong lie of wood ashes, then pickling them in diluted aqua fortis strong enough to remove the defacements, and washing them immediately afterwards in cold water. The last process is to dry them by artificial heat.

Georges Pull, the ceramic artist, who died last year in Paris, made a name by his imitations of old Palissy ware. Many pieces in museums and private collections, for which enormous prices were paid on the supposition that they were the works of Palissy, were produced in his humble atelier. A gold medal was awarded to him a week before his death.